

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: VIRGINIA	
COUNTY: TAZEWELL	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

1. NAME	
COMMON: POCAHONTAS HISTORIC DISTRICT	
AND/OR HISTORIC: POCAHONTAS HISTORIC DISTRICT	

2. LOCATION			
STREET AND NUMBER: See continuation sheet			
CITY OR TOWN: Pocahontas (William C. Wampler, Ninth District Congressman)			
STATE Virginia	CODE 51	COUNTY: Tazewell	CODE 185

3. CLASSIFICATION					
CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No	
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)					
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) town	<input type="checkbox"/> Comments	

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY			
OWNER'S NAME: Multiple Ownership			
STREET AND NUMBER:			
CITY OR TOWN: Pocahontas	STATE: Virginia	CODE 51	

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION			
COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: Tazewell County Court House			
STREET AND NUMBER:			
CITY OR TOWN: Tazewell	STATE: Virginia	CODE 51	

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS			
TITLE OF SURVEY: Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey			
DATE OF SURVEY: 1971 <input type="checkbox"/> Federal <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> State <input type="checkbox"/> County <input type="checkbox"/> Local			
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission			
STREET AND NUMBER: Room 1116 Ninth Street State Office Building			
CITY OR TOWN: Richmond	STATE: Virginia	CODE 51	

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## 7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (If known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The town of Pocahontas is located south of the Virginia-West Virginia line in the Laurel Creek Valley of Tazewell County. Bounded by hills except where the creek enters and departs, the town grew first along the picturesque waterline and later crept up along the steep hillsides south of the creek with the town cemetery and mines located to the north. In the mining area, the original mine is open to the public and the miners bath-house, a stone one-story structure with hipped roof capped by a monitor light, remains nearby.

The town proper may be examined in two portions: the residential neighborhood along Water Street and the area between Water Street and Route 644 including the neighborhoods known as "Grahamville" and "Maple Grove;" and secondly, the predominantly commercial Centre Street with its cross streets, Church and St. Clair. The residential neighborhood is almost totally of frame construction, company-built, using board and batten or weatherboard siding, and presently either having a composition shingle or tin roofing material. A majority of these houses are duplex, two stories in height with shed roof porches. Variations occur through the use of connected shed roof half-dormers at the two center bays of four bay duplexes and the occasional appearance of center chimneys set diagonally to reflect the corner fireplaces in the four-room plans below. Larger houses with deeper floor plans occur along Water Street east of Centre Street. The superintendent's house on the eastern ridge overlooking the town is a simplified version of the Queen Anne style, being frame, two stories, on an irregular plan with cross gable and projecting octagonal tower. All of the churches in this area are simple frame boxes with gable roofs in a vernacular Gothic Revival style having small cupolas or low bell towers and lancet arched openings. The exception is the stone Baptist Church at the west end of Water Street which has an irregular plan with wide Tudor-arched windows and simple lancet-arched mullions. Most of this residential area exists in the flat basin along the creek, but Water Street continues up the eastern hillside curving as it goes, and offers not only a view of the serpentine row of frame residences along its path but contrasting vistas of the more regimented town streets below. The brick early-twentieth century high school at the top of this hill has little architectural significance and is in deteriorated condition, but shares the ridge with a small frame Catholic Church and the superintendent's house. These residential sections of Pocahontas often have tree-lined streets with white picket fences and many of the houses appear to be in stable condition. Individual renovations have caused some composition siding to appear along with the occasional absence of original porches. A particularly interesting survival from the early days of Pocahontas are the tiny brick coal sheds located on the street in front of many of the houses. These receptacles were filled from coal wagons through openings on the street side and emptied by the residents as needed from doors on the lower side walls.

The commercial district fronts on Centre Street which runs from the frame, one story passenger station, now a restaurant, along Laurel Creek, southwards up the hill. A variety of late-nineteenth century brick two story structures line the street, many of them, particularly along the lower (north) end, being former saloons dating from the early 'eighties. Brackets and modillioned cornices with occasional pediments form the roofline and the

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segmental and square-headed window openings are framed by brick corbeling and paneling. Alterations to the first floor storefronts have occurred but the upper stories generally remain intact. Of particular interest is the double-store front on the southeast corner of Twin Alley and Centre Street whose second story consists of an elaborate pressed-metal facade with four demi-octagonal window projections and an intricate bracketed cornice. Also in these lower blocks are located the sprawling frame company store at the southeast corner of Water and Centre Streets, a two story stone bank one block to the north, a turn-of-the-century brick post office with simulated first floor rustication at the northwest corner of Twin Alley and Centre Street, and just to the south, a recent two story Methodist Church - the street's major intrusion. Just east of Centre Street on Water Street are the Pocahontas Fuel Company's offices in a recent three story brick building and directly across the street stands the old brick medical dispensary, now vacant. But the most notable non-residential cross street is St. Clair, especially to the west where the 1895 City Hall occupies the west end of the south side. This brick, two story Italianate building with its second floor auditorium and three story tower is enriched with brick corbeling, a full entablature and pediments over the corner windows. A central vignette at the roofline in the form of a pediment supported by end consoles identifies the building and its date. The City Hall block also holds a remarkably sophisticated bank building that stands out from its plainer brick commercial neighbors. The bank with its arched second floor windows and heavy wooden cornice features a Richardsonian portal consisting of an entranceway flanked by plain column shafts with cubiform capitals below molded blocks that corbel out to support an entablature. St. Clair turns south at the City Hall corner linking up with Church Street one block further south. From this intersection may be seen the weatherworn frame coffinmaker's shop to the west and a series of brick and frame structures to the south across Church Street. Church Street marks the initial rise of the steep hill to the south, and these late-nineteenth century buildings, among which are a Synagogue and a Masonic Hall, rest on a bluff overlooking the flat lands below. St. Clair Street east of Centre is dominated by brick commercial buildings similar to those on Centre Street including, on its north side, two structures using a pressed-tin form on their upper stories. Further to the east are several typical company-built workers' houses. Church Street to the east of Centre Street is similar to St. Clair except for the occurrence of increasing numbers of non-company frame houses with double-tiered front porches, a characteristic of this later hillside area. At the intersection of Church with Centre Street, the modest brick store houses the United Mineworkers Union headquarters.

T.H.

# 8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian	<input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 20th Century
<input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century	

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1881-1882

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal	<input type="checkbox"/> Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Political	<input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning
<input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> Engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) <u>local history</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Historic	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Industry	<input type="checkbox"/> Science	
<input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> Invention	<input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian	
<input type="checkbox"/> Art	<input type="checkbox"/> Literature	<input type="checkbox"/> Theater	
<input type="checkbox"/> Commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	
<input type="checkbox"/> Communications	<input type="checkbox"/> Music		
<input type="checkbox"/> Conservation			

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

8.

The town and mining operations of Pocahontas were developed during the last two decades of the nineteenth century by the Southwest Virginia Improvement Company. The company (now known as the Pocahontas Fuel Company) acquired 31,000 acres of land and undertook the first commercial mining operations in what eventually became one of America's major coal-producing regions. The Norfolk and Western's New River branch line was completed to Pocahontas during the winter of 1882-83 and regular coal shipments began soon thereafter.

Named Pocahontas in 1881 in honor of the Indian Princess, the town was officially recognized the following year when a post office was established there. Its history parallels that of other company towns of the period. The company constructed housing for its officers and other employees, as well as a bath house, company store and offices, and related buildings. The employee paid his rent, grocery and drygoods bill, bath house fees, and other personal and family expenses by means of credit extended by the company. "This provided an easy method for management of one's finances," the historian of Pocahontas has observed, "in that money he received at the end of a pay period was clear and all his necessary debts for the month would be paid up."

Early Pocahontas had the atmosphere of a Western miners' camp or "boom town." Even after the jerry-built boarding houses and shacks of "Old Slabtown" gave way to company-built housing private entrepreneurs continued to operate saloons which attracted customers from throughout the legally-dry county. Public intoxication (there were at one time 27 saloons), gambling, fighting, and the discharge of firearms were the order of business for many a miner on pay-day Saturday nights.

But these same men, during the odd hours left to them following long shifts in the mines, completed construction of their Union Church in 1883. If there were times for wild abandon, there were also times for solemnity; in the spring of 1884, the people of Pocahontas buried 114 of their fellows, killed in one of the worst mining disasters in the history of the United States.

Pocahontas was developed because of its rich coal deposits, and in its seventy-two years, before the mines were closed in 1955, more than 44,000,000 tons of coal were mined.

Architecturally speaking, there are no monuments of outstanding individual significance in Pocahontas. The small bank building and the City Hall on West St. Clair Street are handsome but are more important as symbols of necessary town functions. These and other surviving structures,

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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notwithstanding their obvious aesthetic appeal, express the unique pattern of life that existed in a mining town of the past century. The rows of frame workers' houses have more value as a reminder of the hard life and monotony of existence than as a repetitive linear motif. The same may be said for the Centre Street commercial buildings that express the roughness and bawdiness of Pocahontas's saloon life rather than elegance of Victorian metal and wood detailing. The value of Pocahontas is that it has survived almost intact in the wake of a declining industrial activity and loss of population. A recent HUD-financed study has suggested that Pocahontas be revitalized through development as a tourist-oriented museum town that would illustrate in a romanticized fashion life in a late-nineteenth century mining center.

T.H.

# 9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Haller, Virginia, Pocahontas: A Record of Struggle and Achievement, Economy Printing Co., Roanoke, Virginia, n.d.  
 Jones, Jack M., Early Coal Mining in Pocahontas, 1969.  
 Renkin, Harold W., (History of the Town of Pocahontas) mimeographed, n.p., n.d.  
 Files of Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission.

# 10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE			
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	37° 18' 57"	81° 21' 13"			
NE	37° 18' 57"	81° 19' 57"			
SE	37° 17' 57"	81° 19' 57"			
SW	37° 17' 57"	81° 21' 13"			

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 380 acres.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

# 11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: VIRGINIA HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION STAFF		DATE March, 1972
ORGANIZATION VIRGINIA HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION		
STREET AND NUMBER: Room 1116, Ninth Street State Office Building		
CITY OR TOWN: Richmond	STATE Virginia	CODE 51

# 12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National ☐ State ☒ Local ☐

Name

James W. Moody, Jr., Director

Title Va. Historic Landmarks Commission

Date

MAR 21 1972

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date

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Boundaries correspond to the corporate boundaries of the Town of Pocahontas and include also the boundaries of the Pocahontas Cemetery just on the north. Landmarks recognition applies only to those structures fronting on Church Street, St. Clair Street, Water Street, Centre Street, the residential neighborhood between Water Street and Route 644 including those buildings fronting on Route 644 between the cemetery east to the intersection of said Route and Laurel Creek. Also including the two houses and Catholic Church in the immediate vicinity of the old Pocahontas High School at the eastern end of Water Street but excluding the school itself. Also including the group of houses immediately north of Laurel Creek and west of Route 644. Also including the Exhibition Mine and Bathhouse.

U.S.G.S. 7½' quadrangle (scale:1:24000)  
Bramwell, W.VA.-VA.

POCAHONTAS

latitude	longitude
NW37°18'57"	81°21'13"
NE37°18'57"	81°19'57"
SE37°17'57"	81°19'57"
SW37°17'57"	81°21'13"

